

'Prufread' aids WordPerfect users

Mailing lists and merge files can be incredible time-savers around the office — until it's time to check for duplicates and coding errors.

"Prufread" — available from J&M Enterprises of Wheaton, Ill., for \$69.95 plus \$3 for shipping and handling — eases the tedium of this bothersome, time-consuming task by checking for duplicate entries and formatting problems.

It does in minutes what may take you hours — and the patience of a saint — to accomplish.

The program is easy to use for anyone who knows how to use WordPerfect or WordStar. The documentation is included within the program, and when printed out takes up only four pages.

Here's what Prufread does:

- It checks each entry for the correct number of fields.
- It checks to make sure that "end of record" marks are where they should be.
- It reports on the exact number of records in the merge file.
- It checks the files for exact duplicates and automatically re-



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The method employed to check for duplicates is quite amazing: it compares each and every field of every record with the same fields in the previous record. Since the program requires you to sort the file prior to this operation (using Word Perfect's sort function, for example, with any field as a key), the prior record is likely to resemble the current record in some way. You define how many fields must match in order for the records to be flagged for your review.

Prufread senses exact and possible duplicates by putting two re-

moves the second (and third or fourth) entries.

■ It identifies possible inexact duplicates and reports them to a separate file or prints them so they can be verified and corrected.

cords at a time into memory and comparing them field by field.

With WordPerfect, which allows you to use two files at the same time on two separate screens, you can keep your merge file on the first screen and the error report on the second screen. Because the errors are reported in the same order they are found, you can toggle back and forth between the files, use a search command to find the erroneous records, and then quickly edit them one by one.

Prufread, with its goofy spelling, is not to be confused with the spell-checker functions that comes with these two popular word processing packages. Those functions catch misspellings, check for duplicate words and provide you with a word count for your file.

Prufread, on the other hand, goes further. It saves you time and keeps your merge files accurate, in addition to eliminating the cost and embarrassment of duplicate mailings.

But the program is good for anything you could use a merge file

for, not just mailing lists. It comes in handy for merge files that handle data, contracts, even form letters. I found it fast and easy to use.

Of course, it's not foolproof. Just like the spell-checkers, Prufread catches lots of errors and duplications, but it doesn't know about misspelled names or misplaced commas.

After it catches all the obvious glitches, you'll still need to manually review all the inexact duplicates and decide what to do about each one.

The bottom line: If you depend on WordPerfect or WordStar merge files, Prufread's duplicate-catching feature will save you time, money and frustration. Although its \$69.95 price may seem high, it's worth it.

Hillel Segal's previous Computer column now has been broadened to include evaluations of gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.